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SUBJECT: Peoples Party's Junkyard Dog: Gundars Berzins

11. Summary. For almost a year, one of the leading members of the People's Party (TP) Gundars Berzins has regularly given interviews to daily paper Neatkariga Rita Avize (NRA) where he harshly and offensively criticizes developments, institutions, persons that according to his views hamper the implementation of the TP's intentions and policies. A constant object of his criticism has been the U.S., in particular the Embassy and the former Ambassador, who according to Berzins, was "intervening in Latvia's domestic affairs and squeezing Latvian politicians like lemons." His influence within the party, as well as the lack of any desire by others in the party to distance themselves from his statements leads to a conclusion that Berzins' statements are something more than personal views of Mr. Berzins. While they may not be the official views of TP, party leaders certainly see value in a bit of anti-American rhetoric for their voters. End summary.

12. For almost a year one of the most influential People's Party members Gundars Berzins has had a series of interviews mostly with a daily NRA (the fact, that the daily is owned by Ventspils Mayor Aivars Lembergs should not be underestimated either). Each interview is full of extremely rude, often obscene, statements aimed at various high officials. His attacks started last fall just before the previous Ambassador gave a speech at the University of Latvia on the status of rule of law in Latvia. Berzins reproached the U.S. Ambassador for what he termed constant interventions into Latvian domestic affairs and attacked Latvian politicians for being too weak to oppose her.

13. Then followed a series of interviews where Berzins continued voicing strong anti-American stances along with harsh criticism towards any official, and institution, including "Diena," the anti-corruption bureau (KNAB) and its chief Loskutovs, Latvian President Zatlers, intelligence (SAB) chief Kazocins, Prosecutor General Maizitis, and others. The level of criticism seemed in direct proportion to activities that might run counter to the interests of TP or its supporters. As debate began on the possibility of reelecting Kazocins, Berzins claimed (falsely) that Kazocins visited the Embassy 2 - 3 times a week and compared him to a kitchen maid for the US Ambassador.

14. His statements are often openly rude and provocative. For instance, when asked to comment on a statement of former Minister of Foreign Affairs Artis Pabriks [when Pabriks decided to resign as minister and also leave TP Pabriks stated that some comments of the TP oldest members, clearly meaning Berzins, on alleged US intervention in Latvia's affairs are not acceptable] Berzins responded "the little boy should change his wet pampers, put on the new ones and then come out to the public and reveal his true views on restitution to the Jewish community." (adding some anti-Semitism to go with anti-Americanism). Berzins did not spare even President Zatles, although he was among a handful of people who participated in the selection and "training" of the candidate. In one interview, following the collapse of the Kalvitis government and after Zatlers rejected TP's candidate for PM, Berzins compared President Zatlers to a carpet that just lays there and where one can urinate or even defecate on. (Comment: The President is reported to have had a colorful reaction in his own right. End comment.)

15. More recently, as the scandal on money missing from the KNAB has grown, Berzins has suggested that there is a "cancer" in the security

institutions that threatens Latvia. He has been especially critical of KNAB chief Loskutovs. Loskutovs and his supporters note with a combination of amusement and disbelief that last fall, during Kalvitis' attempts to remove Loskutovs, Berzins talked about more than 100,000 lats being missing from KNAB -- a fact that did not become known to the KNAB or prosecutors office until April of this year.

¶16. The response of TP members is notable for often being non-existent. None of Berzins' statements have been officially supported by his party or individual members. At the same time, there have not been any attempts of the party or its individual members to condemn or distance themselves from the offensive and ungrounded statements. The usual response of individual party members when asked to comment the statements has been that those are personal views of Gundars Berzins and he has the right to voice his personal views. While people who are not related to TP are not convinced that those are simply Berzins' personal views because of his status within the party.

¶17. Comment: Berzins statements should be seen in the context of his status within the TP. Berzins is probably the second most influential person within the party, after founder Andris Skele. Berzins was one of a original founders of the party and has managed to remain one of Skele's closest associates. He has been quite successful in public politics: he has been elected to parliament several times, including the last two parliaments. In 2004, he became minister of health in the Kalvitis government and continued to be a health minister also in the next Kalvitis government after the 2006 elections, resigning in 2007 saying he needed to rest. Some signs of anti-Americanism were observed when he strongly lobbied prohibition of the sale of Coca-cola in schools in 2006. The rules he proposed unfairly targeted Coca-Cola in comparison to other

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similar brands and he refused multiple offers by the company to discuss alternative resolutions to his concerns. After leaving politics, he claimed that he would fully devote himself to farming business. However, he is still quite a visible figure in Latvian political scene - he is believed to be the one who noticed potential prime ministers in Kalvitis and TP nominee last fall to succeed Kalvitis, Kuldiga mayor Edgars Zalans. He is also participating in all crucial high level and quite often confidential inter-party meetings. From time to time, his name is mentioned as a potential TP candidate for the post of Prime Minister.

¶18. Comment, cont: Most of Berzins' statements are not based on verifiable facts and his tone is often simply offensive and rude. However, the statements should not be underestimated either, because they are published in one of the biggest Latvian dailies and the timing and content of the interviews seem to be rather well planned. Whatever the reason for them and whatever the origin, his statements are used as an instrument to a voice within TP on issues which could not be included in its official policy, including attacking the U.S. Nevertheless, these views resonate with a certain part of the electorate, so TP is perfectly happy to reap the political benefit of such attacks.

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